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DOI:

[10.1016/j.medengphy.2016.11.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.medengphy.2016.11.011)

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*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Du, M, Kalia, N, Frumento, G, Chen, F & Zhang, Z 2017, 'Biomechanical properties of human T cells in the process of activation based on diametric compression by micromanipulation', *Medical Engineering & Physics*, vol. 40, pp. 20-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.medengphy.2016.11.011>

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First checked 1/12/2016

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**Biomechanical properties of human T cells in the process of activation based on  
diametric compression by micromanipulation**

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## **Abstract**

A crucial step in enabling adoptive T cell therapy is the isolation of antigen (Ag)-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes. Mechanical changes that accompany CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocyte activation and migration from circulating blood across endothelial cells into target tissue, may be used as parameters for microfluidic sorting of activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells. CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were activated in vitro using anti-CD3 for a total of 4 days, and samples of cells were mechanically tested on day 0 prior to activation and on day 2 and 4 post-activation using a micromanipulation technique. The diameter of activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells was significantly larger than resting cells suggesting that activation was accompanied by an increase in cell volume. While the Young's modulus value as determined by the force versus displacement data up to a nominal deformation of 10% decreased after activation, this may be due to the activation causing a weakening of the cell membrane and cytoskeleton. However, nominal rupture tension determined by compressing single cells to large deformations until rupture, decreased from day 0 to day 2, and then recovered on day 4 post-activation. This may be related to the mechanical properties of the cell nucleus. These novel data show unique biomechanical changes of activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells which may be further exploited for the development of new microfluidic cell separation systems.

**Key words** T lymphocytes; Activation; Cell Separation; Mechanics; Micromanipulation

## Introduction

Cell-based therapies have witnessed tremendous expansion in the past two decades, from curative haematopoietic stem cell transplantation for leukemias to adoptive antigen (Ag)-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell immunotherapies of viral infections and cancers. CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells for adoptive immunotherapies can be generated through *in vitro* expansion or immunomagnetic isolation of pre-existing Ag-specific lymphocytes from blood or tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes. The former method has the drawback of driving T cells to exhaustion through repeated cycles of *in vitro* antigen stimulation and expansion, which ultimately impacts on their efficacy to eliminate tumour or infected cells [1]. This is in contrast to direct *ex vivo* selection which requires minimal manipulation and thus retains the proliferative capacity and therapeutic functionality of the lymphocytes.

For this reason, immunomagnetic selection of fresh *ex vivo* cells has been adopted in recent clinical trials where a small number of pre-existing circulating virus-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells can be directly selected from donor blood to target viral infections and tumours in stem cell transplant patients [2-4]. This method has been used to treat cytomegalovirus, Epstein–Barr virus and adenovirus infections, and also lymphomas such as post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorder. Immunomagnetic selection systems utilize antibody or ligand-recognition of unique phenotypic markers on the cell surface to separate cells. With the recent breakthrough in utilising T cells expressing the CD19-specific chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) for the treatment of B cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia [5], selection of Ag-specific cells could also become a key purification step in the *in vitro* expansion of immunoreceptor engineered cells.

71 However, there are limitations to immunomagnetic methods with regards to the loss of  
72 low frequency cells through multiple processing steps such as washes and sub-optimal  
73 purity and recovery from the selection itself, and not least, the costs of the specialized  
74 GMP reagents. An alternate approach to immunomagnetic isolation, is to select cells  
75 using clinical grade fluorescence-activated cell sorting (FACS) [6-8]. Though highly  
76 sensitive and specific, FACS sorting of rare cells (<1%) to therapeutic quantities, is time  
77 consuming and associated with the risk of reduced cell viability [9].

78  
79 The biophysical properties of cells also allow different cell types to be discriminated. For  
80 example, in flow cytometry the cell size determines light scattering properties, and in  
81 apheresis, centrifugal forces separate blood into its constituent cellular components  
82 based on physical properties. An emerging technique based on microfluidic separation  
83 utilizes the biophysical properties of live cells by applying different hydrodynamic forces  
84 on the target particles or by utilizing the natural biomechanical variation of the cells to  
85 guide them into different flow paths [10]. Studies reporting cell sorting based on size or  
86 stiffness demonstrate the potential applications of the microfluidic cell sorting technique  
87 for separating tumor cells, erythrocytes as well as activated Ag-specific T cells [11-14].  
88 It should therefore be possible to use natural or induced variations in biomechanical  
89 properties to separate activated lymphocytes from non-activated lymphocytes and other  
90 cell types.

91  
92 However, before we can utilize microfluidic assays to separate lymphocytes for clinical  
93 therapeutic purposes, a more precise study of their biomechanical properties is needed.

Parameters such as cell rigidity and deformability can be measured using several techniques including atomic force microscopy (AFM), micromanipulation, magnetic tweezers, micropipette aspiration, optical tweezers, shear flow, cell stretching and microelectromechanical systems [15]. Powerful techniques such as AFM have previously been used to measure the elastic properties of lymphocytes, but only deform a portion of the cell surface (nano-indentation) and so do not measure the mechanical properties of the whole cell [16]. However, circulating lymphocytes experience significant repeated hydrodynamic and mechanical stresses in blood vessels, which are applied along their entirety leading to large deformations in the microcirculation. These are particularly seen following lymphocyte activation when they transmigrate out of blood vessels into the surrounding interstitial tissue. Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanical properties of lymphocytes under large, as well as small, deformations. Of the techniques mentioned, micromanipulation, based on the compression of single cells between two parallel surfaces, can be used to generate small to large deformations of cells, including deformations where they rupture, which is appropriate for the purpose [17].

We report the first study that uses the micromanipulation technique to measure the temporal biomechanical changes of CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells following Ag-induced stimulation. Moreover, the studies were conducted on live cells rather than fixed cells. We have determined mechanical strength parameters such as rupture force, rupture deformation and nominal rupture stress/tension for resting (unactivated) and activated T cells compressed to rupture. We have also modeled the compression data of T cells

corresponding to smaller deformations to obtain a measure of the elasticity, defined as the Young's modulus. This work provides important new data on the biomechanics of activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells which can be used for future development of microfluidic separation of cells that have selectively responded to specific antigen stimulation.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Isolation, culture and *in vitro* activation of T lymphocytes**

Peripheral blood was collected from three healthy drug-free adult donors after informed consent. Peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) were isolated by Ficoll separation. The contaminating erythrocytes were removed by osmotic lysis. Briefly, 1 ml of distilled water was added to the cell pellet. After 30s, 14 ml of RPMI 1640 (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was added, and the cells were washed once. Untouched CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes were isolated by negative immunomagnetic selection, using CD8<sup>+</sup> T Cell Isolation Kit and LS columns (Miltenyi Biotec, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany), following the manufacturer's instructions. Cell purity was checked using a FacsCanto II flow cytometer (BD, San Jose, CA, USA) and in all the cases the CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocyte purity was above 90%. Enriched CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes were resuspended in RPMI 1640 plus 10% foetal calf serum (Sigma-Aldrich, UK). Some cells were activated by culturing in the presence of 30 ng/mL anti-CD3 antibody OKT3 (BioLegend, San Diego, CA, USA) plus 600 U/mL IL-2 (Chiron, Emeryville, USA). For control samples, the non-activated

CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were cultured in the medium for up to 4 days, and they were mechanically tested on Day 0, Day 2 and Day 4.

### **Micromanipulation technique**

The mechanical properties of resting and activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes were measured either immediately after harvesting (day 0) or tested 2 days or 4 days post-activation. Cells were diluted with phosphate buffered saline to reduce cell density in suspension and mechanical testing was completed within 3 hours using a well established micromanipulation technique, the principle and details of which have been previously described [17, 18]. Briefly, the technique involves compression of a single cell between the flat end of a probe and the bottom of a glass chamber containing the culture medium (**Figure 1**). A microscopic image of a single mammalian cell under compression is presented in [18]. Suspended single cells were allowed to settle to the bottom of the chamber, and images were captured with a side-view high-speed digital camera. A probe with a 25 µm diameter was driven down by a stepping motor towards the single cells. The probe was connected to a force transducer (406A-ER, Aurora Scientific Inc. Canada) in order to collect the data of instantaneous force imposed on single cells at a frequency of 50 Hz.

### **Determination of activation-related changes in cell size**



The diameter of CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells was directly measured from their images on a TV monitor which was connected with the side view camera on the micromanipulation rig. The magnification of the camera had been pre-calibrated, and the measurement of cell diameter was accurate to  $\pm 0.1\mu\text{m}$ . The cell size was also evaluated by flow cytometry. The enriched CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes were stained with anti CD3/PE and 7AAD (BD). The forward scatter (FSC-A) value of the 7AAD-/CD3<sup>+</sup> cells was recorded using the FacsCanto II flow cytometer (BD, San Jose, CA, USA).

#### **Determination of rupture force, rupture deformation, nominal rupture stress and nominal rupture tension**

Single cells from each of the 3 donor samples were selected randomly and compressed to large deformations until they ruptured using a probe at the speed of  $2\mu\text{m/s}$ . The number of cells taken from each sample was 20 in order to give statistically representative results. The force ( $\mu\text{N}$ ) imposed on the cell was plotted against the distance ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) the probe moved towards the glass chamber (force vs displacement). These graphs were then used to determine the mean rupture force and the percentage (%) deformation at rupture for resting and activated cells. The % rupture deformation was calculated as the ratio of the displacement value at rupture to the initial diameter of the cell.

Nominal rupture stress ( $\sigma_R$ ) was calculated as the ratio of the rupture force to the initial cross-sectional area of the cell. Nominal rupture tension ( $T_R$ ) was calculated as the

ratio of the rupture force to the initial diameter of the cell. These values provide a comparable indication of the mechanical strength of cells and were calculated using Equations (1) and (2) respectively, where  $F_R$  is the rupture force and  $d$  is the original diameter of the single cell before compression.

$$\sigma_R = \frac{4F_R}{\pi d^2} \quad (1)$$

$$T_R = \frac{F_R}{d} \quad (2)$$

## Determination of the Young's Modulus

Theoretically, the Hertz model is valid and commonly used to describe the relationship between the imposed force and displacement for small deformations of an elastic object, which has been successfully applied to determination of the Young's Modulus of different particles including cells when compressed to a small deformation [19-21]. The experimental force versus displacement data up to a nominal deformation of 10% were fitted to Equation (3), similar to the approach described in [20] to determine the Young's modulus of T cells, having presumed that the individual cells were homogeneous, incompressible, elastic spheres and that there was no friction at the cell-substrate interfaces.

$$F = \frac{E * \sqrt{2R}}{3(1-\nu^2)} \delta^{3/2} \quad (3)$$

where F is the applied force, E is the Young's modulus of the cell, R is the original cell radius,  $\nu$  is the Poisson's ratio of the cell and  $\delta$  is the diametric compressive displacement. From the model, there should be a linear relationship between F and  $\delta^{3/2}$ . From the slope of the linear fitting, cell radius and Poisson ratio (assumed to be 0.5 since the cells are assumed to be incompressible), the value of Young's modulus was determined - higher values indicate cells that are less deformable for a given applied force and vice versa.

210

## 211 **Statistical analysis**

212 Values for the mechanical property parameters of the lymphocytes are presented as  
213 mean  $\pm$  standard error. Paired Student t-tests were performed to determine significant  
214 differences among the mechanical properties of different samples, with statistical  
215 significance reported at the 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

216

## 217 **Results**

### 218 **Activation of CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes increases their cell size**

The diameter of the single cells was measured from their images using the side-view camera on the micromanipulator. The diameter of resting CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells (day 0) was  $6.1 \pm 0.6 \mu\text{m}$ . This increased significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) upon activation to  $9.7 \pm 1.1 \mu\text{m}$  on day 2 post-activation and remained significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) greater on day 4 post-activation when compared to resting cell values (**Figure 2a**). There was no significant difference between the activated samples at day 2 and day 4 post-activation. Changes in cell diameter are also shown by the data generated using flow cytometry (**Figure 2b**). The FSC-A value of resting T cells are again significantly greater on day 2 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and day 4 post-activation ( $p < 0.05$ ) when compared to resting cell values. Interestingly, it was noted that CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells that had been activated and tested on day 2 post-activation tended to 'stick' to the force transducer probe (image not shown), possibly indicating some change in their adhesive nature in the early stages of activation.

### **Compression curves of T cells to rupture**

Micromanipulation studies demonstrated that the individual CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells tested in the same sample were heterogeneous in their diameter and their force versus displacement curves even for single cells of same diameter, however, all tested single cells showed common characteristics in their compression curves. Typical curves showing the relationship between the force and displacement during continuous diametrical compression of a single lymphocyte to rupture at day 0, 2 and 4 days post-activation are shown in **Figures 3a-c**. At point A, the probe started to touch the cell, and the resistant force increased until point B where the cell ruptured. As a result of rupture, the force

decreased rapidly to point C, followed by curve CD where the force increased continuously which represents the compression of cell debris until the probe touched bottom of the glass chamber.

#### **Rupture force increases at 4 days post-activation**

The mean cell rupture force ( $\mu\text{N}$ ) was determined from the force vs displacement curves (y-axis value at point B). The rupture force was similar between the resting (day 0) and activated cells at 2 days post-activation with mean values of  $2.3 \pm 0.8 \mu\text{N}$  and  $2.6 \pm 0.9 \mu\text{N}$  respectively. However, when activated cells were analyzed at 4 days, the rupture force significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) increased to  $4.6 \pm 1.6 \mu\text{N}$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) when compared to resting cells (**Figure 4a**). The % rupture deformations of resting T lymphocytes and activated lymphocytes at 2 and 4 days post-activation was not significantly different with mean values of  $78.3 \pm 1.3\%$ ,  $79.7 \pm 1.6\%$  and  $77.5 \pm 1.5\%$  obtained respectively (**Figure 4b**).

#### **Nominal rupture stress / tension decreases at 2 days post-activation**

The nominal rupture tension significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) decreased from  $0.58 \pm 0.07 \text{ N/m}$  for resting cells to  $0.45 \pm 0.07 \text{ N/m}$  for cells at 2 days post-activation. This increased to  $0.62 \pm 0.10 \text{ N/m}$  on day 4 post-activation, a value not significantly different to resting cells (**Figure 5**). A similar pattern was observed for nominal rupture stress (**Figure 5**).

#### **Young's modulus decreases in activated $\text{CD8}^+$ T cells**

The Young's modulus was calculated from data obtained corresponding to small deformations of T cells. Typical force versus displacement data with a linear fit based on the Hertz model for cells at day 0, 2 and 4 days post-activation are shown in **Figures 6a-c**. Mean correlation coefficient values of  $0.84 \pm 0.05$ ,  $0.85 \pm 0.04$  and  $0.85 \pm 0.06$  were obtained for resting cells and cells at 2 days post-activation and 4 days post-activation respectively. The values of Young's modulus decreased significantly at both 2 days post-activation ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 4 days post-activation ( $p < 0.05$ ) when compared to resting cells at day 0 (**Figure 6d**). Actual calculated mean values for the Young's Modulus were  $58.0 \pm 6.3$  kPa,  $43.7 \pm 5.0$  kPa, and  $43.0 \pm 6.3$  kPa for T lymphocytes at day 0, day 2 post-activation and day 4 post-activation respectively. There was no significant difference in the mean Young's modulus between T cells activated for 2 days and 4 days ( $p > 0.05$ ).

#### **No change in the mechanical properties of non-activated CD8+ T cells for up to 4 days**

The diameter of non-activated T cells did not change significantly upon incubation on day 2 and day 4 when cultured in the medium (Figure 7a). There was also no significant difference in the nominal rupture tension/stress between the resting samples, as shown in Figure 7b.

#### **Discussion**

This novel study analysed the biomechanical properties of live lymphocytes undergoing activation using a micromanipulation technique, without the need for fixing the cells.

Mammalian cells can show heterogeneity in their biomechanical property parameters, which is reflected in the standard error of the mean, and 3 donors should give reasonably representative results [22]. An increase in cell volume was observed as a result of activation at both 2 and 4 days post-activation. An initial fall in whole cell mechanical strength was observed at 2 days post-activation as indicated by the decreased rupture stress/tension values. Thereafter, although lymphocytes remained bigger, they regained their mechanical strength at day 4 post-activation, possibly reflecting the tailing off of activation and cellular recovery. However, the Young's modulus at small deformations (up to 10%), decreased at both 2 and 4 days post-activation suggesting the outer membrane became and remained flexible. This is the first time, as far as we are aware, that a micromanipulation technique has been used to directly analyze the biomechanical properties including rupture strength of human T cells at various time points post-activation. A summary of the data obtained are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Change in the mechanical properties of human T cells at 2 days and 4 days post-activation

<i>All values compared to resting cells</i>	<i>Cell size</i>	<i>Rupture force</i>	<i>% rupture deformation</i>	<i>Rupture stress and tension</i>	<i>Young's modulus</i>
2 days post-activation	↑	–	–	↓	↓
4 days post-activation	↑	↑	–	–	↓

301

302 The rupture force for activated cells at 4 days post-activation was significantly greater  
303 than resting and activated cells at 2 days post-activation. At first glance, this suggested  
304 these cells were “stronger”, thus requiring the greater force to rupture. However, this  
305 data did not take into account that the size of the cells was different for the three groups  
306 which could explain their differing rupture force. Increases in CD8+ T cell size at similar  
307 time points have previously been described microscopically post-OKT3 activation [23,  
308 24] and occurs so that activated lymphocytes can duplicate their contents and divide. To  
309 make comparisons between the mechanical properties of resting and activated cells,  
310 nominal rupture stress and tension was calculated, which took into account the initial  
311 cross-sectional area and diameter of the cells. It should be pointed out that the initial  
312 cross-sectional area may be different from the real contact area between the force  
313 probe or bottom substrate and cell at rupture, and the latter depends on the deformation  
314 at rupture. As Figure 3b shows, the deformation at rupture did not change significantly  
315 up to 4 days, the choice of using nominal rupture stress for comparison is still valid.  
316 Once corrected for size, it became apparent that resting cells and cells at 4 days post-  
317 activation were equally strong but more than cells at 2 days post-activation. Hence the  
318 nominal stress/tension data indicated that CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes became weaker early  
319 during activation, while their mechanical strength was regained 4 days later. The higher  
320 mechanical strength of the resting lymphocytes is essential functionally to maintain  
321 sufficient integrity and thus protect them from damage by the significant hydrodynamic  
322 and mechanical stresses exerted on them in the circulation [25]. Following stimulation  
323 by Ag-presenting cells *in vivo*, CD8+ T cells move out of the circulation to the site of



infection where they acquire cytolytic effector activity against the pathogen. Therefore, the initial weakened cellular strength observed in this study may functionally correlate with, and enable, the transmigration of circulating lymphocytes between endothelial cells into tissue. After this event, lymphocytes regain their original form and strength for mediating effector activity and this functionally correlates with the higher nominal rupture stress/tension observed at 4 day post-activation than day 2.

Previous studies have shown that the nucleus of T lymphocytes is approximately 5 times stiffer than the cytoplasm and occupies about 80% of the cell [26]. This characteristic makes T lymphocytes different from other eukaryocyte cells (mesenchymal cells, endothelial cells, etc.) in which the cell nucleus only occupies ~10% of the cell volume [27]. When faced with higher compressive forces, the lymphocyte cell nucleus therefore plays an increasingly significant role in resisting the applied force for the whole cell. The reduced nominal rupture stress / tension at 2 days post-activation indicates the cell nucleus, as well as the cell membrane and cytoskeleton of these larger cells, may have become less strong. However, at the later stage of activation (from day 2 to day 4), these structures regained their mechanical strength while cell volume remained unchanged during this time.

At lower applied force, which compresses the cell to a smaller deformation, the mechanical stiffness of T cells is governed primarily by the membrane which is considered to be largely elastic. The Young's modulus is a measure of the intrinsic stiffness of an elastic material undergoing recoverable compression. The Hertz model

was able to determine the Young's modulus of T lymphocytes at small deformations (up to 10%), hence providing an indication of the elasticity of the outer region (cell membrane and cytoskeleton) of the cell. Although the noise to signal ratio is relatively big corresponding to small deformations, significant differences between samples were still demonstrated from the values of Young's Modulus. The results indicate that depolymerization or reorganization of cytoskeleton polymers probably happened when the cells were activated, resulting in softness of the outer cortex during the 4 days. From the rupture parameters at large deformation and the Young's Modulus calculated at small deformation, we hypothesized that the cytoskeleton remained less stiff post-activation, while the nucleus regained rigidity during the 4 days activation, which remains to be validated in future. In the calculation of Young's modulus, for living cells, the Poisson ratio is typically between 0.4 and 0.5, which means they are mostly or fully incompressible [28]. A value of 0.5 is chosen here since the Poisson ratio of CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes has not been studied. Moreover, from the Hertz model (Eq. 3), it can be seen that Poisson ratio ( $\nu$ ) has little effect on Young's modulus that increases by only 12% when  $\nu$  varies from 0.4 to 0.5. For measuring the local Young's modulus of the cell membrane with greater sensitivity, and its spatial distribution, AFM may be used which can measure the forces in the order of pico-Newton to nano-Newton.

## Conclusions

Using biomechanical properties in microfluidic cell sorting is increasingly recognized as a marker-free way to separate biological cells. With the increasing interest in using CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells for therapeutic purposes, a separation method in which cells remain unperturbed is important if they are to be transplanted after mechanical characterization and sorting. This study utilizes the micromanipulation technique, a relatively straightforward method to evaluate the mechanical property changes of activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes. It has been found that there was no significant change in the mechanical property parameters including cell size, nominal rupture stress and rupture tension of non-activated CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells in the culture medium for up to 4 days, which is in clear contrast to those activated *in vitro* using anti-CD3. The activated cells showed a significant increase in size and decrease in rupture stress/tension at day 2 but the mechanical strength recovered at day 4. The data obtained on size and mechanical properties post-activation may be utilized for developing microfluidic devices for their separation. Furthermore, this work obtains complementary data for CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells circulating *in vivo* with respect to adapting to the mechanical barriers. The ability to directly measure the biomechanical properties of live lymphocyte subsets not only facilitates the development of a cell separation system based on defined physical properties of cells but also provides a 'biomarker' for assessing the physical state of lymphocytes, that could be used for assessing quality after bioprocessing of cells eg. cryopreservation.

391

392 **Acknowledgments**

393 This study is sponsored by a joint Li Siguang Scholarship from the University of  
394 Birmingham, UK and the China Scholarship Council.

395

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## Figure Legends

**Figure 1.** Schematic diagram of the micromanipulation rig: (1) Force transducer; (2) probe; (3) stepping motor; (4) computer with motor control and data acquisition system; (5) Bottom-view microscope; (6) side-view microscope; (7) high-speed camera; (8) single cells in phosphate buffered saline; (9) glass chamber.

**Figure 2.** Changes in the diameter of T lymphocytes was quantitated using (a) direct measurement of a microscopy image generated using the side-view camera on the micromanipulator and (b) flow cytometry. Both methods showed a similar significant increase in cell diameter as a result of T cell activation. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. \* $p < 0.05$  as determined using a paired Student t-test.

**Figure 3.** Typical force-displacement curves obtained at a compression speed of  $2\mu\text{m/s}$  for T cells to rupture on (a) day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. At point A, the probe touched the cell and the resistant force increased until point B where the cell ruptured. Rupture resulted in the force decreasing rapidly to point C, followed by curve CD where force increased until the probe touched bottom of the glass chamber. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. \* $p < 0.05$  as determined using a paired Student t-test.

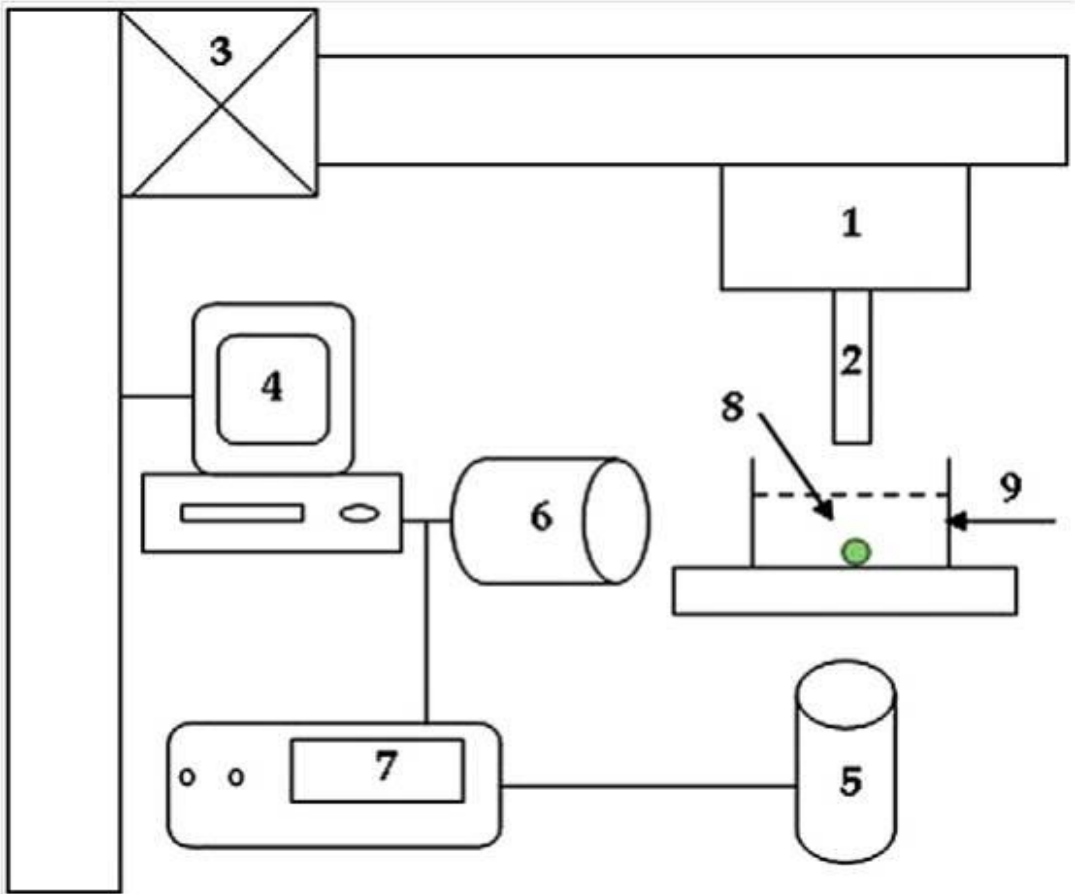
**Figure 4.** The (a) mean rupture force and (b) mean rupture deformation of T cells on (a) day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. The force required to rupture cells was larger for activated cells at 4 days post-activation. All cells were ruptured when they reached a % deformation close to 80%. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. \* $p < 0.05$  as determined using a paired Student t-test.

**Figure 5.** The nominal rupture tension and nominal rupture stress of T cells on (a) day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. Both values significantly decreased for cells at 2 days post-activation. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. \* $p < 0.05$  as determined using a paired Student t-test.

**Figure 6.** The typical linear fit (line) of the Hertz model to the obtained force-displacement data ( o ) for T cells compressed to small deformations on (a) day 0 prior to activation (resting cells) (b) day 2 post-activation and (c) day 4 post-activation. The mean values of the correlation coefficient are  $0.84 \pm 0.05$ ,  $0.85 \pm 0.04$  and  $0.85 \pm 0.06$  respectively with an overall range of 0.7 to 0.9. (d) The Young's modulus was calculated from these data, which decreased significantly as a results of activation. N=3 donor samples for each group with 20 single cells, selected randomly from each sample. \* $p < 0.05$  as determined using a paired Student t-test.



513    FIGURE 1



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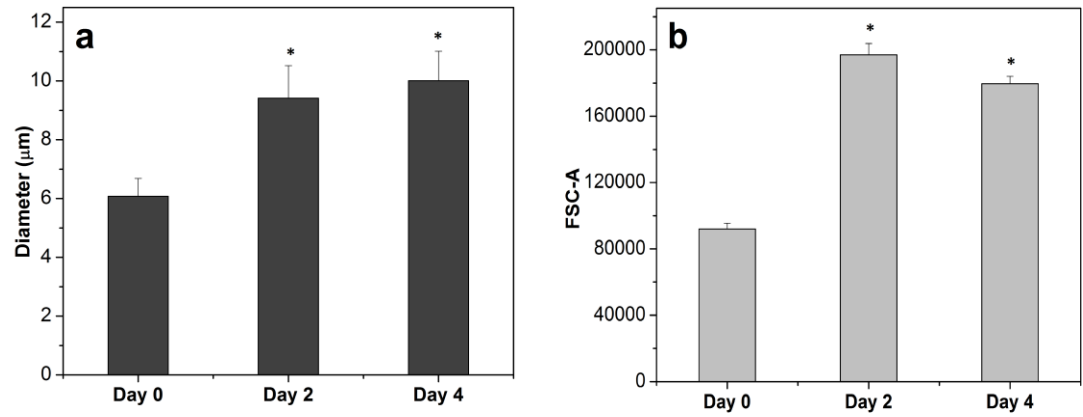
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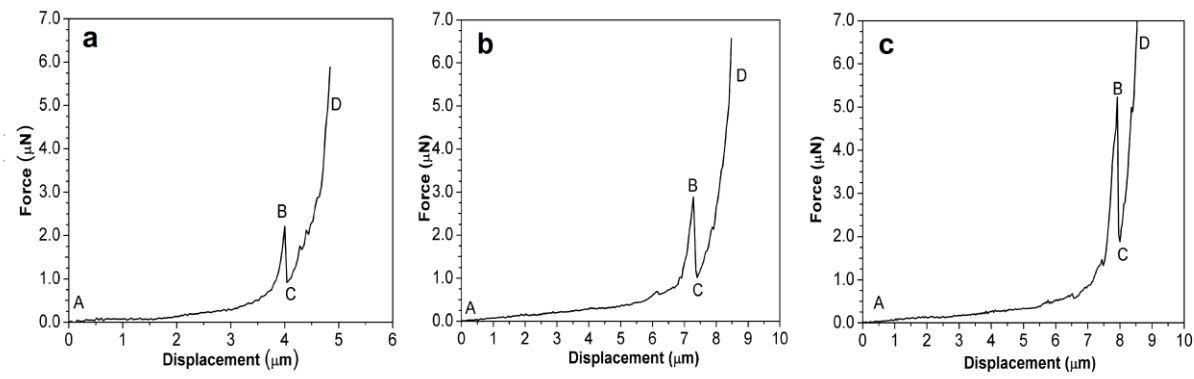
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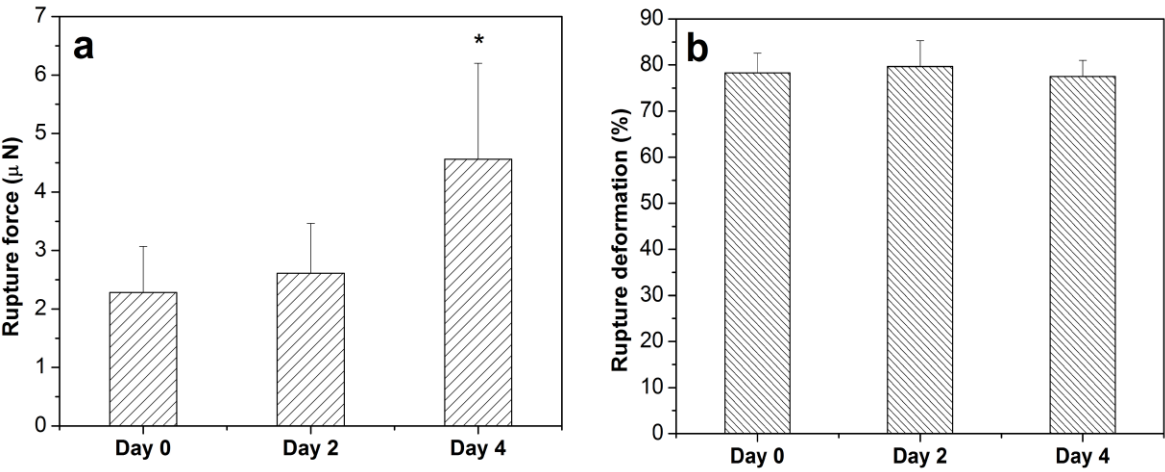
521      **FIGURE 2**



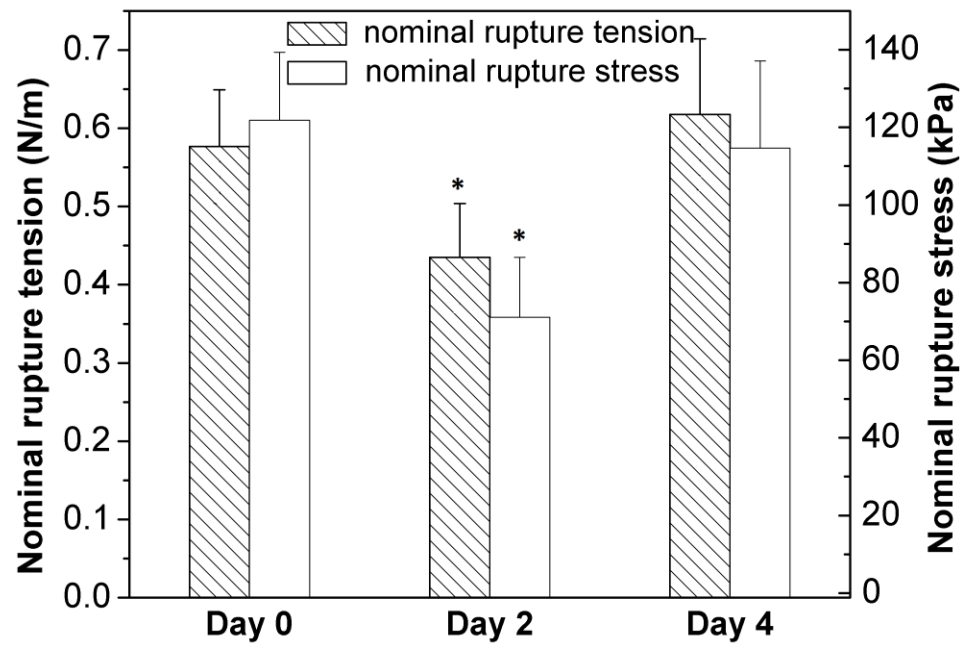
533      **FIGURE 3**



545      FIGURE 4



556      FIGURE 5



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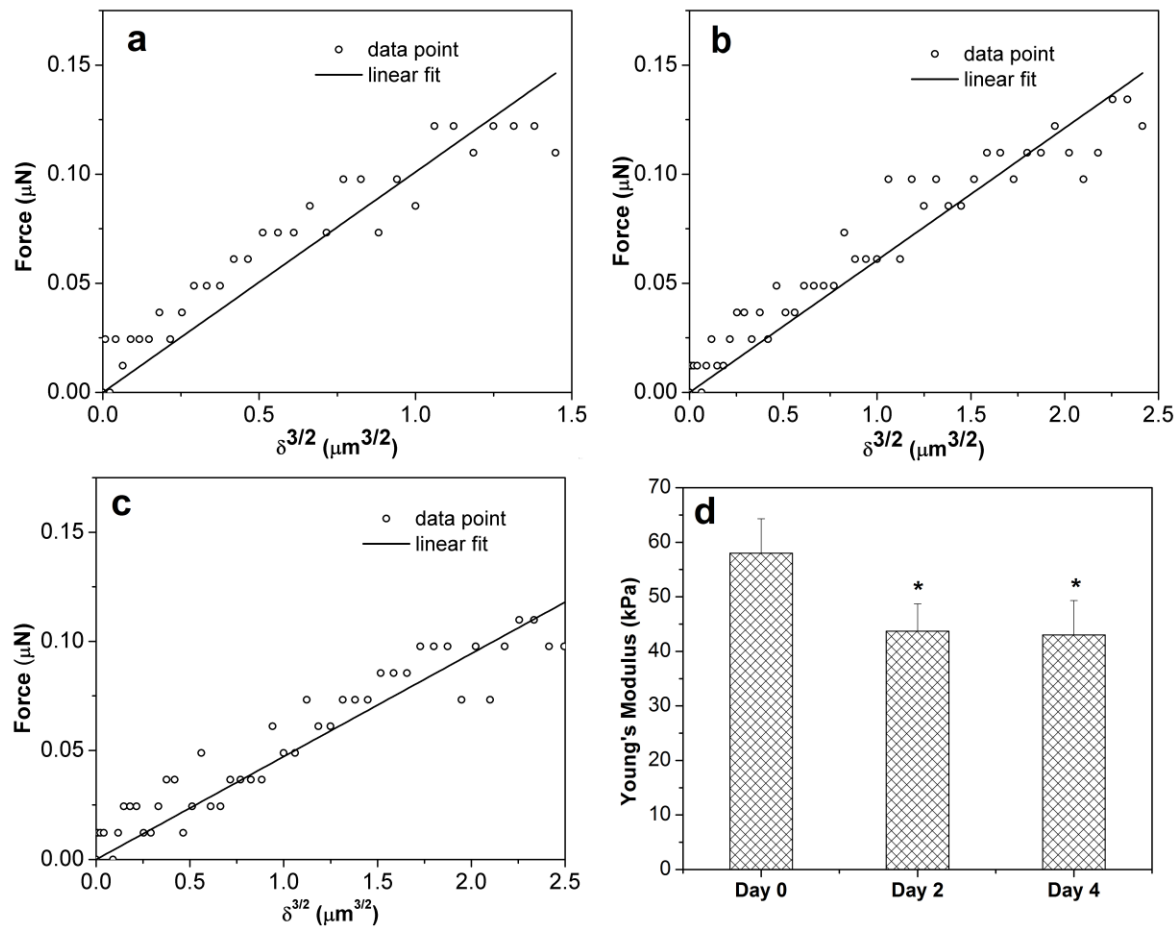
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565      **FIGURE 6**



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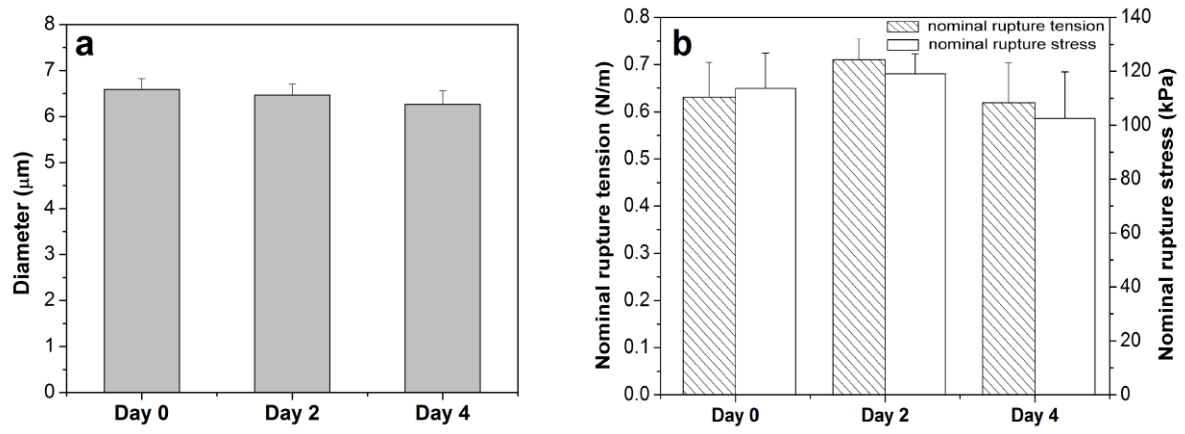
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572    **FIGURE 7**



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